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Baynard in a letter dated the same day as Pope's. Sealy expressed hope that "the people" had profited from the missionary's presence, but he "could see nothing of it." Sealy, like Pope, withheld consent for the missionary's coming within the confines of his plantation.[25] Denominational rivalry may have been a factor in decisions to deny Methodists access to the slaves, and Baptists expressed the most skepticism toward missionaries. But more significantly, the Methodist-Baptist controversy provides insight into religious activity among the slaves prior to the missionaries' coming.

Thomas Turpin, assigned to the May and New River Mission in 1833, had his own opinions about the state of religion in the Sea Islands, and defended himself regarding his unsuccessful efforts among the bondspeople. Turpin had access to about 1,000 adult slaves, one third of whom were in the Baptist church and in the "Negro societies, and all of them under Baptist influence." Yet these slaves rarely saw the pastor of the church or attended its services. Instead, Turpin related, the slaves had "societies organized among themselves." According to the missionary, "these societies were very corrupt." Turpin described a scene at one black society gathering on Bull's Island in which a particular type of penance, drawn from African traditions, was engaged in as punishment for sin:

> They had three degrees of punishment, and . . . the punishment was inflicted agreeably to the magnitude of the crime, according to their view of the crime. If the crime was of the first magnitude, the perpetrator had to pick up a quart of benne seed . . . poured on the ground by the priest; and if of the second, a quart of rice; and if of the third a quart of corn; . . . they also had high seats and low seats, but incorrect views relative to those who ought to be punished; . . . it was also a rule among them never to divulge the secret of stealing: and if it should be divulged . . . that one had to go on the low seat or pick up the benne seed.[26]

The rite the slaves engaged in is reminiscent of high-low seats and a pyramid of degrees in the Poro and Sande in Upper Guinea, and some secret societies in Angola. The Poro inner circle was a social regulating as well as religious body. It stopped quarrels, caught, tried, condemned, and punished social criminals. In Poro-Sande culture, high seats belonged to a few old religious leaders of high degree.[27] But the way Gullahs employed the use of high-low degrees was unique and reflected their ability to adapt a past tradition to the organization of their slave community. The association of the communal and the spiritual is evident,

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since this regulation took place within a religious context, ostensibly under the rubric of Christianity. High and low seats in Gullah society assumed a meaning different from African Poro-Sande society. But the function of regulation and community control was still present. The Gullahs reserved the "low seat" for those who betrayed community interests by divulging "the secret of stealing," undoubtedly from the master. This demonstrates the seriousness of solidarity among the people. Thus picking up the benne seed was reserved for the worst of crimes "according to their view of the crime." While the Methodist missionary believed the slaves had incorrect ideas about who should be punished, slaves themselves were using an internal logic with little reference to Protestant conceptions of sin. This Gullah interpretation of sin was at variance with their Christian instruction. A sense of contrition for the safety and peace of the plantation or out of fear of the Christian God was not a motivating issue. For the Gullahs, moral guilt fell on those who forsook socioreligious authority and loyalty in the slave quarters. The presence and influence of black leadership was also revealed as the "punishments" were administered by a "priest." This implies no relationship to the Christian church to which some of the slaves belonged. Missionary Turpin believed the rites strangely akin to Catholicism. Obviously they were not. But in West Africa Poro-Sande priests and priestesses were responsible for administering justice and punishment. Thus this role had some cultural-historical continuity. Slaves saw nothing incongruous about adopting elements of Christian religion and adapting those to aspects of their traditional spiritual heritage still serviceable in the New World setting.

The penance for the "sin" of divulging the secret of stealing was no brief activity, but a rather trying feat. A "gentleman" residing on Bull's Island informed Turpin that an individual usually could not pick up all the scattered benne seeds in one night. And "if it was not done in one night they had to continue until they did it." Thus while the benne seed ritual was not comparable in degree to African punishments instituted by the Poro Council for community crimes, there is a symbolic reference. While representing a form of censure for erring members, it was not the way "Christianized" slaves were expected to interpret the concept of "sin." Turpin stated in his report that having to contend with "all this superstition and ignorance, together with their prejudices against Methodism," he had added few church members. Nor, reported Turpin,

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did he strive to do so, "but rather . . . to beat down their prejudices and to establish a better principle of religion among them, all of which I should not presume any person in this low country would attempt to contradict."[28]

Planters in the May and New River Mission region were offended by statements implying that they tolerated practices such as the one Turpin discussed. Sea Island Baptists felt under attack for not instructing black converts in "true" principles of Christianity and for baptizing slaves without scrutinizing their religious life. Turpin was smarting from the cold reception he received from planters. Turpin did in fact infer that some planters were aware of and permitted un-Christian practices among slaves baptized as Baptists. It was after all a "gentleman" of the Island who had explained to Turpin the workings of the benne seed penance he had observed. Methodist unpopularity among Sea Island planters was recognized at the Missionary Society Headquarters. Soon after the report was circulated, Turpin was removed from the May and New River Mission, and assigned to the John and Wadmalaw Islands Mission in the Charleston District. Turpin insisted, however, that he did not intend to discredit the planters. Nor, he said, did he mean that planters knowingly sanctioned "corrupt" practices among the slaves. Turpin merely wished to point out how irreligious so-called converted slaves were. Through the pages of the *Southern Christian Advocate*, he made a somewhat cynical apology, which undoubtedly did little to assuage the ire of Sea Island planters:

> But it [the report] appears to have injured the feelings of many of the Baptist friends. I did not intend to injure their feelings, nor any other persons, notwithstanding though, it has been said that I have "shot a ball particularly at the Baptists, and in its glance it was hit the Episcopalians." If it has made any mortal wound by its being received in a light different from what I intended, I feel it my duty to heal the wound.[29]

Turpin had indeed offended the planters, especially his comments on the slaves' lack of "truly religious" training, despite Baptist church membership. He believed that the "converted" slaves made a mockery of Christianity. These slaves who "scarcely ever saw the pastor" of their church were members of the First African Church in Savannah. Andrew Bryan's nephew, Andrew Marshall, was the pastor. In 1830, church membership was 2,417. Although a black church, whites were responsible for control and for the conduct of its members. Whites came to the

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APPENDIX B

Excerpts from a "Missionary Sketch" Written by Thomas D. Turpin to the Christian Advocate and Journal, January 31, 1834.

. . . the number of adults to whom I had access in preaching were about 1,000, one third of whom were in the Baptist Church and in the negroes societies, and almost all of them under Baptist influence; and that a great many of those lived on an island who scarcely ever saw the pastor of the Church to which they belong. Hence they had societies organized among themselves; and that those societies were very corrupt, and appeared to be very much under the influence of Roman Catholic principles; and that they did penance, and the following was a specimen, viz; that they had three degrees of punishment, and that the punishment was inflicted agreeably to the magnitude of the crime, according to their view of the crime. If the crime was of the first magnitude, the perpetrator had to pick up a quart of benne seed poured on the ground by the priest; and if of the second, a quart of rice; and if of the third, a quart of corn; and that they also had high seats and low seats, but incorrect views relative to those who ought to be punished; and that it was also a rule among them never to divulge the secret of stealing; and if it should be divulged by any one member, that one had to go on the low seat, or pick up the benne seed. I observed, having to contend with all this superstition and

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1799 ignorance, together with their prejudices against Methodism, that I had added very few to the Church; and I had, moreover, strived very little to do this, but rather strived to beat down their prejudices and to establish a better principle of religion among them, all of which I should not presume any person in this low country would attempt to contradict.

But it appears to have injured the feelings of many of the Baptist friends. I did not intend to injure their feelings, nor any other persons. Notwithstanding, though it has been said, that I have shot a ball particularly at the Baptists, and in its glance it has hit the Episcopalians. If it has made any mortal wound by its being received in a light different from what I intended I feel it my duty to heal the wound.

1797 1795 In regard to the words Baptist influence, it has also been observed, that it has generally been received as intending to mean that the whites have knowledge of those corruptions among the negroes, and tolerate them. I had no such meaning. I simply meant that the negroes were under the peculiar influence of the Baptist tenets. Now, unless the Baptist tenets tolerate the doing of penance (which the world knows to the contrary), it could not mean that they tolerated these things among the negroes. It is notorious that almost all of the negroes in the bounds of my mission are prejudiced in favor of the Baptist Church.

• 681 As it respects the picking up of the benne seed, it has been said that it was not a very likely thing that it could be done in one night. In answer to this, I heard a gentleman say, no longer than last week, that the rule was, if it was not done in one night, they had to continue until 1795 they did it—Again, as regards those of whom I spoke, who scarcely ever saw the pastor of the Church to which they belong, they were a set of negroes belonging to Andrew Marshall's church of Savannah. It may be objected that Andrew Marshall is nothing more than a negro. If he is, that does not derogate at all from the truth of the assertion made in the letter stated above. The negro has been authorized by the Church to preach and baptize.—He has done it, and he has baptized a great many in this low country; and those of whom I spoke are in that number. He is the only pastor that those negroes have on the island. He never comes to see them, nor any other Baptist minister. Therefore the facts remains, there are many negroes on Bull's Island that scarcely ever see the pastor of the Church to which they belong. This is the light in which I in- (1797) tended it should be received . . . the little negroes improve on the mission, but the adults are about the same as represented in the above statement.